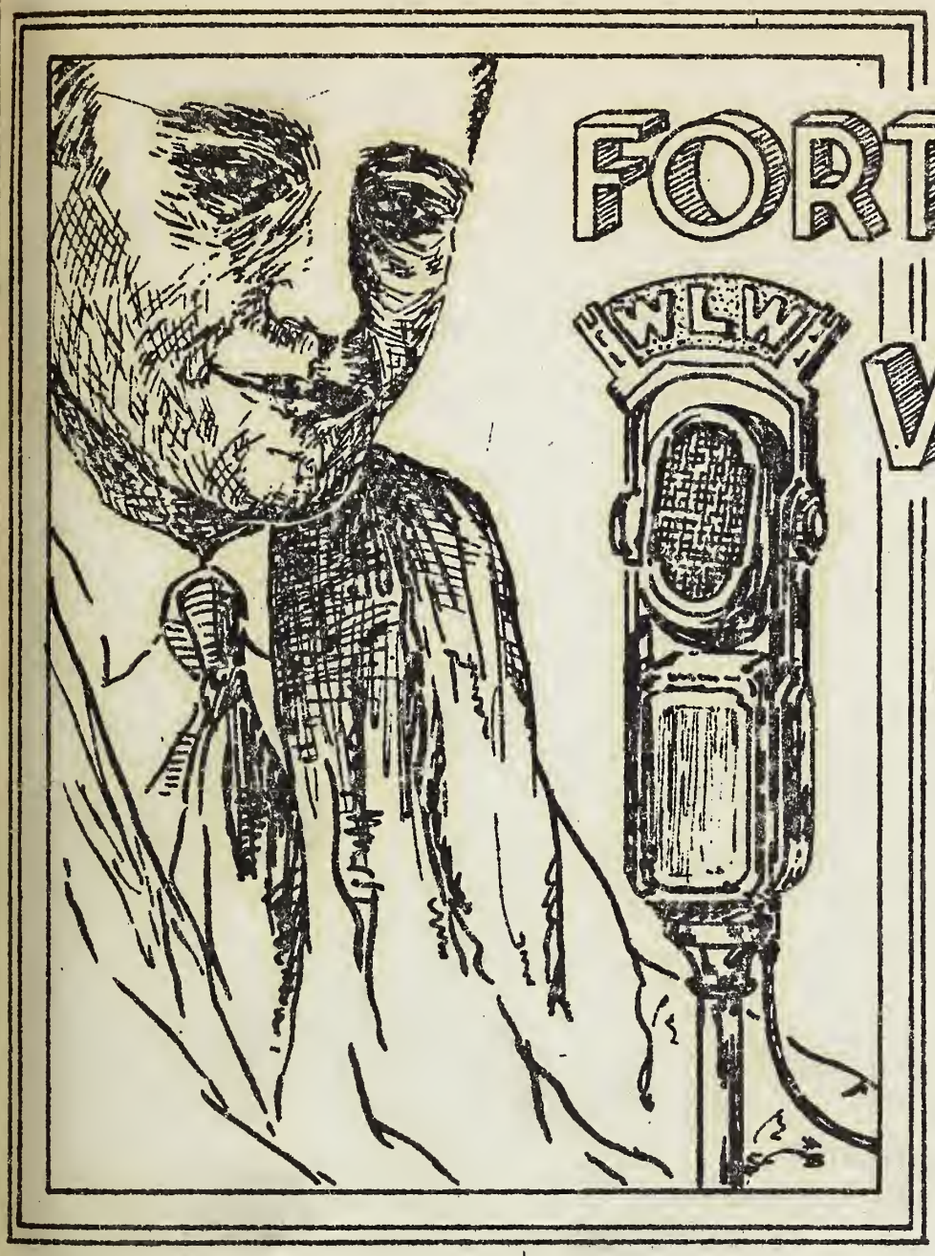

FORTUNES WASHED AWAY

A Series of Dramatizations of Better Land Use

No. 144 January 25, 1941 1:15 p.m.

"INDIANA'S ONION KING"

W·L·W CINCINNATI

United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service
Dayton · Ohio

SOUND: Whistling wind...

VOICE

Black blizzards across the plains.

SOUND OFF MIKE: Woman coughing...

SECOND VOICE

Biting wind!

VOICE

Choking dust.

SOUND: Up wind, set fire...

SECOND VOICE

Havoc...

VOICE

Destruction...

SECOND VOICE

Waste...

SOUND: Up wind, kill fire, set flood...

VOICE

Floods rushing down the great valleys.

VOICES IN UNISON

Floods, drowning, killing, wasting...

SOUND: Up wind...

VOICE

The wealth of America washing and blowing away -- soil erosion!

SOUND: Clap of thunder...

ANNOUNCER

Indiana's Onion King: the 144th consecutive episode of Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: DEEP RIVER.

ANNOUNCER

Scientists call it Allium cepa, but by any other name it would smell the same. It is the onion. Some people abhor the onion -- but the Egyptians called it divine, and it is a god on some of the ancient monuments. Ancient, yes...because the onion has been grown from time immemorial. A member of the lily family, it has spread to all countries occupied by civilized man. A deep, rich, loose soil is considered best for its production, and for that reason the black muck of Fulton County, Indiana, produces some of the best Spanish onions in these United States. Famous among Indiana farmers are two men from Fulton County -- Whitney K. Gast and his father, A. A. Gast -- known as "Double A" Gast. Less than a year ago, Fulton County farmers met in the county courthouse. They were serious men, some in overalls, some in rough jackets, some dressed up a bit -- but each man had his heart set on solving the soil erosion problem. County Agricultural Agent M. J. Huxley had explained the problem -- had told them that there was not a section in Henry Township that didn't need some sort of erosion control.

SOUND: Soft crowd noises...

ANNOUNCER

Huxley told them what a soil conservation district might mean. He showed them a map developed by the farmers themselves, a map that showed the seriousness of soil erosion in their home county. He asked for comments from the crowd. Men got up...Jim Miller, Hugh Wildermuth, Ralph Lukens, Ed Case, Roy Jones...on down the line, farmer after farmer. Then it came the turn of Whit Gast... Whit Gast, the man who....

SOUND: Gong...

ANNOUNCER

Purdue University graduate; former county agricultural agent.

SOUND: Gong...

GAST

Well, those Katahdin potatoes did it...627 bushels per acre. Now they call me the Indiana potato king!

SOUND: Gong...

ALMA

Whit, you've done it again....more than a hundred bushels of corn per acre. Say, that hybrid corn must be all right!

SOUND: Gong...

FATHER

Whit, I'm proud of you! More than sixteen hundred bushels of Southport onions per acre -- the largest in the state...maybe the largest in the whole country! Whit Gast -- my son -- onion king of Indiana!

SOUND: Loud gong...

ANNOUNCER

That was the man who got up to speak. To those farmers

SOUND: Soft crowd noises...

in a land of potatoes, onions, corn, cabbage and peppermint...

GAST

Hux, I don't know that I have much to say. But when I was a county agent I was asked a lot about soil erosion. Some of those farms are hopeless now -- past doing anything with. We want to save ours before they get in that condition. Besides doing the good it will, by producing better crops, this district should save our soil for our children. I've got children -- Dick, over at Purdue, Karen and Karl. My dad did his level best to save the soil...

FATHER (INTERRUPTING)

Now hold on there, Whit.

GAST

Do you have something to say, Dad?

FATHER

Yes, I do. Anybody that has been around here as long as I have knows that the land is changing.

GAST

I've been doing some muck farming for a while myself, Dad, and I agree.

FATHER

Then you should know. I've listened to Lee Marsh, and Max Kuhn, Selah Maby, and all of the rest talk about your farming experiences. I've had mine, too. I bought a farm about 30 years ago, and it didn't have any gullies. Now we have to plow sweet potato vines under to keep them from washing away. I've always been careful, but there's no question that the land isn't going away. Whit, you remember that terrible blow we had back in the twenties? I'm sure the rest of these folks do.

GAST

I remember it very well. I had just come in from the mint field, and was....

SOUND: Gentle wind, with occasional rattling of windows...

ALMA

I sometimes wonder if all this labor is worth it, Whit. Peppermint seems to be taking up most of your time lately.

GAST

I like to be busy...and these muck lands are the best in the state for growing it. They brag about their mint fields up in Saint Joe County, Michigan, and Cass County, but I'll put ours up against them any day. Give some people California, or the Great Plains, or the South, but I'll take Indiana with her good old muck lands.

ALMA

And yet, if we didn't have drainage, we wouldn't have these muck fields. From what your father has told me, these lands...

FATHER (fading in)

Did I hear my name called? If it's for supper, it'd better be in a hurry, because Old Saint Nick ain't coming to see us -- it's the very devil himself.

ALMA

What do you mean?

SOUND: Increase wind gradually....

FATHER

Come over here to the window. Look out there.

ALMA

Why, it looks like it's going to rain.

FATHER

Rain! Alma, that's a duster coming up.

ALMA

I didn't know this muck land would blow like that.

GAST

You'll learn.

ALMA

As I started to tell you, Whit...your father told me that muck soil is composed mainly of decayed vegetable matter.

FATHER

And is especially adapted to producing truck crops, yes sir. You see, Alma, long long ago, this land was covered by lakes. They called it the "Black Swamp" or something like that. But along came some smart engineers, and they drained the land. That rotted vegetable matter made mighty fine humus for the soil.

SOUND: Up sharply on wind...

ALMA

It's coming! It is wind!

FATHER (Shouting)

I'd better lock the barn doors.

GAST (shouting)

Wait! I'll help!

SOUND: Up wind, hold, then die down gradually...

SOUND: Brush piano keys vigorously with rag...

ALMA

Now, don't look at me like that, Whit. That muck has gotten in between every key on the piano. It'll take weeks to get it out.

GAST

You don't know the half of it.

ALMA

And I tried to stuff rags in every window and door.

GAST

The mint roots have blown out. The crops a loss. The dust has filled the drainage ditches. I figure that our yields will be cut 40 percent this year -- just because of soil erosion. I'm going to do something about it. (PAUSE).

SOUND: Soft crowd voices...

GAST (fading in)

That one dust storm taught me a lesson. Even now, every part of our farm needs some sort of erosion control...some sort of protection from wind and rain. I've tried to be a good farmer. You fellows can kid me about...

SOUND: Gong...

GAST

Indiana potato king.

SOUND: Gong...

ALMA

Hundred bushel club!

SOUND: Gong...

FATHER

And now, Onion King of Indiana!

SOUND: Loud gong...

GAST (softly)

But more than all these, I'd rather be known as a conservation farmer. I am for the soil conservation district.

ORGAN: SNEAK IN DEEP RIVER

ANNOUNCER

Fulton County, Indiana, has its onions today, its peppermint, its potatoes, its many truck crops that give it prosperity. It has farmers like W. H. Gray, Lon Lukenbill, Roy Jones, Jim Clemens -- and men like "Double-A" Gast and his son, Whitney K. Gast, and now, with Whit Gast as the chairman of the board of supervisors, it has its soil conservation district. Indiana's agriculture makes another forward step -- to defend this soil of America.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT

ANNOUNCER

That is the true story of the background of the soil conservation district recently established in Fulton County, Indiana. And now, once again we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is Ewing Jones.

JONES

Thanks, John Cornell. Honors continue to pile up on Whit Gast. Last week, at Farmers' Week at Purdue University, he was given special recognition as a "DPA" -- distinguished Purdue agricultural graduate, and his picture will be hung in the hall of fame.

ANNOUNCER

Is this award given annually?

JONES

Oh, no....it's only when a graduate does something especially outstanding. Mr. Gast is only the third to receive this honor, the last one being L. B. Florea, three years ago.

ANNOUNCER

Then I imagine that County Agent Huxley is mighty proud that Fulton County was given this recognition. It shows that it is a land of good farmers, if any of the others are like Whit Gast.

JONES

Not all of them have been so highly honored, naturally...but there are others that have been given special notice for their farming operations. To name a couple offhand, there are J. R. Miller -- he's another soil conservation district supervisor -- Mr. Miller has won high dairy honors. And E. L. Mitchell was also some sort of an onion king. Mitchell, by the way, was chairman of the county land use planning committee that was first to recommend formation of the district.

ANNOUNCER

And now they're becoming "soil conservation kings", you might call them.

JONES

The fact that they've organized the district shows that they realize what a serious problem soil erosion can be. Do you know how much erosion costs this country each year, John?

ANNOUNCER

I don't know the exact figure, Ewing, but I've heard that it is constantly increasing.

JONES

Three billion, 844 million dollars a year.

ANNOUNCER

Three billion, 844 million dollars a year! That figure is almost beyond comprehension.

JONES

Yet that's the cost -- and it makes us realize that while we are taking steps to defend the nation, we must also defend the soil. And that's what the Fulton County farmers are doing. Mr. Huxley is mighty optimistic about the future of his county, too. He believes that the new soil conservation district will be fundamental in spreading conservation practices over the remainder of the county, and into other counties. You see, John...the muck soils may be on flat land, but they have to be handled just as carefully as other soils. They need lime and fertilizer, they need proper drainage, and protection from wind erosion -- and of course, protection from silt washed down from nearby slopes. That's what the farmers of Fulton County have found out. They got together, and made a map of the county showing where soil erosion control was needed. They got together, sent in a petition for a soil conservation district. They voted for that district. Now, working together, they are developing a land use program and plan of action that will mean permanent prosperity to Fulton County, Indiana -- a county where men work together to hold this soil of ours

ORGAN THEME: DEEP RIVER.

JONES (on cue)

This is Ewing Jones, speaking for the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. And if you want to hear about swiss cheese, and how an Ohio farmer produces good quality milk to make good swiss cheese, be back with us next Saturday at this same time for the next episode of "Fortunes Washed Away."

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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